

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of brokering a print job between a customer and a plurality of print providers, the method comprising the steps of:
 - 5 providing a print brokering system controller having a printing capability of each of the print providers registered therewith;
 - defining a network communication link between the customer and the print brokering system controller;
 - comparing a print request for the print job with the printing capability of each of the print providers and determining which of the print providers have the printing capability to fulfill the print request; and
 - 10 compiling a list of at least one of the print providers which has the printing capability to fulfill the print request.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of defining the network communication link includes defining an Internet communication link between the customer and the print brokering system controller.
- 20 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
 - registering the printing capability of each of the print providers with the print brokering system controller.
- 25 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of defining the network communication link includes defining the network communication link between the customer, the print providers, and the print brokering system controller, and wherein the step of registering the printing capability includes registering the printing capability of each of the print providers with the print brokering system controller via the network communication link.
- 30 5. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of registering the printing capability includes registering at least one of a file format compatibility, a print

medium capability, a printing layout capability, a color printing capability, a finishing capability, a delivery capability, and an identification of each of the print providers.

- 5 6. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of registering the printing capability includes storing a registration of the printing capability of each of the print providers, and wherein the step of comparing the print request includes retrieving the printing capability of each of the print providers.
- 10 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: generating and submitting the print request for the print job to the print brokering system controller via the network communication link.
- 15 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of generating and submitting the print request includes specifying at least one of a file format, a number of copies, a print medium, a printing layout, a color printing option, a finishing option, a delivery option, and a customer identification for the print job.
- 20 9. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of generating and submitting the print request includes submitting a parameter of a performance attribute of the print job, and wherein the step of comparing the print request includes: performing a first match of the print request with the printing capability of the print providers and establishing a first subset of the print providers based on the first match,
- 25 querying the first subset of the print providers on the performance attribute of the print job and receiving a response thereto, and performing a second match of the parameter of the performance attribute with the response thereto and establishing a second subset of the print providers based on the second match.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the first subset of the print providers is one of less than the plurality of print providers and equal to the plurality of print providers.

5 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the second subset of the print providers is one of less than the first subset of the print providers and equal to the first subset of the print providers.

10 12. The method of claim 9, wherein the performance attribute of the print job includes at least one of a price of the print job, an availability to complete the print job, and a turnaround time for completing the print job.

15 13. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of compiling the list includes ranking the second subset of the print providers based on the performance attribute of the print job.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps of comparing the print request and compiling the list are performed by the print brokering system controller.

20 15. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of compiling the list includes ranking the at least one of the print providers based on at least one attribute of the print request.

25 16. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
presenting the list of the at least one of the print providers to the customer via the network communication link.

17. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
selecting at least one print provider of the at least one of the print providers to fulfill the print job; and
30 submitting the print job to the at least one print provider.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the step of defining the network communication link includes defining the network communication link between the customer, the print providers, and the print brokering system controller, and

5 wherein the step of submitting the print job includes submitting the print job to the at least one print provider via the network communication link.

19. A system for brokering a print job between a customer and a plurality of print providers, the system comprising:

10 a print brokering system controller configured to have a printing capability of the print providers registered therewith,

wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to receive a print request for the print job and compare the print request with the printing capability of the print providers to determine which of the print providers have

15 the printing capability to fulfill the print request, and wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to compile a list of at least one of the print providers which has the printing capability to fulfill the print request.

20. The system of claim 19, further comprising:

20 a print provider interface configured to communicate with the print brokering system controller via a network communication link to transmit the printing capability of each of the print providers to the print brokering system controller.

25 21. The system of claim 20, wherein the network communication link is an Internet communication link.

22. The system of claim 20, wherein the print provider interface includes at least one of a file format options field, a print medium options field, a printing

30 layout options field, a color printing options field, a finishing options field, a delivery options field, and a print provider identification field.

23. The system of claim 19, wherein the printing capability of each of the print providers includes at least one of a file format compatibility, a print medium capability, a printing layout capability, a color printing capability, a finishing capability, a delivery capability, and an identification of each of the print providers.

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24. The system of claim 19, further comprising:
a print brokering data storage system configured to communicate with
10 the print brokering system controller and store a registration of the printing capability of each of the print providers therein.

25. The system of claim 19, further comprising:
a customer interface configured to communicate with the print brokering system controller via a network communication link to transmit the print request
15 for the print job to the print brokering system controller.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the network communication link is an Internet communication link.

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27. The system of claim 25, wherein the customer interface includes at least one of a file format field, a number of copies field, a print medium field, a printing layout field, a color printing option field, a finishing option field, a delivery option field, and a customer identification field.

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28. The system of claim 19, wherein the print request includes at least one of a file format, a number of copies, a print medium, a printing layout, a color printing option, a finishing option, a delivery option, and an identification for the print job.

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29. The system of claim 19, wherein the print request includes a parameter of a performance attribute of the print job, and wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to perform a first match of the print request with the printing capability of the print providers and establish a first subset of the print providers based on the first match, query the first subset of the print providers of the performance attribute of the print job and receive a response thereto, and perform a second match of the parameter of the performance attribute with the response thereto and establish a second subset of the print providers based on the second match.

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30. The system of claim 29, wherein the first subset of the print providers is one of less than the plurality of print providers and equal to the plurality of print providers.

15 31. The system of claim 30, wherein the second subset of the print providers is one of less than the first subset of the print providers and equal to the first subset of the print providers.

32. The system of claim 29, wherein the performance attribute of the print job includes at least one of a price of the print job, an availability to complete the print job, and a turnaround time for completing the print job.

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33. The system of claim 29, wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to rank the second subset of the print providers based on the performance attribute of the print job.

34. The system of claim 19, wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to rank the at least one of the print providers based on at least one attribute of the print request.

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35. The system of claim 19, wherein the print brokering system controller is adapted to present the list of the at least one of the print providers to the customer via a network communication link.

5 36. The system of claim 35, wherein the network communication link is an Internet communication link.

37. A method of brokering a print job between a customer and a plurality of print providers, the method comprising the steps of:

10 providing a print brokering system controller having a printing capability of the print providers registered therewith;

generating and submitting a print request for the print job to the print brokering system controller;

comparing via the print brokering system controller the print request with

15 the printing capability of at least one of the print providers and determining if the at least one of the print providers has the printing capability to fulfill the print request; and

compiling via the print brokering system controller a list of the at least one of the print providers if the at least one of the print providers has the printing

20 capability to fulfill the print request.

38. The method of claim 37, further comprising the steps of:

defining an Internet communication link between the customer and the print brokering system controller, wherein the step of generating and submitting

25 the print request and includes generating and submitting the print request for the print job to the print brokering system controller via the Internet communication link; and

presenting the list of the at least one of the print providers to the customer via the Internet communication link.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein the step of defining the Internet communication link includes defining the Internet communication link between the customer, the print providers, and the print brokering system controller, and further comprising the steps of:

5 selecting at least one print provider of the at least one of the print providers to fulfill the print job; and
 submitting the print job to the at least one print provider via the Internet communication link.

10 40. The method of claim 39, further comprising the step of:
 registering the printing capability of the print providers with the print brokering system via the Internet communication link, including registering at least one of a file format compatibility, a print medium capability, a printing layout capability, a color printing capability, a finishing capability, a delivery capability, and an identification of the print providers.

15 41. The method of claim 37, wherein the step of generating and submitting the print request includes specifying at least one of a file format, a number of copies, a print medium, a printing layout, a color printing option, a finishing option, a delivery option, and a customer identification for the print job.

20 42. The method of claim 37, wherein the step of generating and submitting the print request includes submitting a parameter of a performance attribute of the print job, and wherein the step of comparing the print request includes:

25 performing a first match of the print request with the printing capability of the at least one of the print providers and establishing a first subset of the print providers based on the first match,
 querying the first subset of the print providers on the performance attribute of the print job and receiving a response thereto, and

performing a second match of the parameter of the performance attribute with the response thereto and establishing a second subset of the print providers based on the second match.

5 43. The method of claim 42, wherein the performance attribute of the print job includes at least one of a price of the print job, an availability to complete the print job, and a turnaround time for completing the print job.